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This study was designed to find out what things other than academic grades influenced professors to think of a student as "ideal." Faculty were asked to nominate "ideal" students without considering grades alone and were further asked to comment upon the reasons for their choice. The characteristics of the students, along with students with high grade-point averages who were not chosen, and a group of non-selected lower-average students were examined. It was found that there are several traits which strongly influence faculty selection and that these are fairly constant. Such traits included cognitive intelligence, directed intellectual curiosity, general likability, and maturity, as well as others such as independence, specific skills, integration, penetration, analytic ability, moral responsibility, originality, flexibility, promise for future, aesthetic appreciation, and intellectual integrity.

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NON-INTELLECTIVE QUALITIES AND THE PERCEPTION OF THE IDEAL STUDENT BY COLLEGE FACULTY

by

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NON-INTELLECTIVE QUALITIES AND THE PERCEPTION OF THE IDEAL STUDENT BY COLLEGE FACULTY*

Donald R. Brown

In many discussions of the value of a liberal arts education, one is reminded of Mark Twain's farmer who when asked if he believed in baptism replied, "Believe in it? Why I've seen it done!" This acceptance on faith has, it must be admitted, brought higher education a long way but it has also allowed educational resources to be channeled in a most pluralistic manner and the term liberal arts itself has been used to cover a puzzling array of educational endeavors.

With the current population pressures and sky rocketing costs, it is unlikely that we can afford to operate on faith and vagueness any longer if we want to preserve the very best in American education, increase its availability, and indeed, improve it.

How can one best proceed in the task of defining what we educators so firmly believe in? One approach which suggested itself to us as psychologists studying the total educational process at a women's liberal arts college was to approach the problem empirically and attempt to determine what qualities beyond grades were characteristic of students whom the faculty selected as ideal students. Our longitudinal and cross sectional studies of the basic personality development during the college years provided a rich source of data which could be supplemented by the official records of the College. We were, of course, guided in our approach by the assumption that academic achievement and the successful attainment of a liberal education was a broadening experience which was inseparable from the total maturing of the personality; a process on which we had collected a good deal of information.

The task then, was one of clearly stating criteria of academic goals which we would define by the study of faculty choices of ideal performance.

Before lightly dismissing the classical intellective criteria of academic success, grades and achievement scores, let me present the need which exists for more differentiated criteria associated with the suc-

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* The study described was conducted while the author was on sabbatical leave from Bryn Mawr College. It was a part of the ongoing research program at the Mary Conover Mellon Foundation at Vassar College and was supported by a grant from the College Entrance Examination Board. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, September 1958.

cessful attainment of a liberal arts education. It is obvious that a certain level of intellectual capacity is required for college success but above that minimal level there is a wide range of actual college performances. that are considered successful. The experience of many colleges which select students partly by scores on the College Board examinations indicate an increasing ability to predict, and thus avoid, failures but, conversely, an increasing inability to predict the relative grade performance of those selected. Therefore the need for more differentiated predictors which are contingent with intellectual capacity arises as a practical requirement.

However, as important as the prediction problem is from the practical standpoint, the maximizing of student performance and capacity (through understanding of the basic developmental and motivational trends in the individual student as he interacts with the college environment) is by far the more important long range goal of the educator.

A few additional comments on the inadequacy of intellectual predictors as such are in order. Not only do they not throw light on the motivational problem, except insofar as the intellectual development at the time of testing is contingent on the proper motivational development, but they are not causally related to growth and development. We have been struck by the fact, obvious enough in itself but frequently not recognized by virtue of its being so common, that grades might be obtained in quite different ways. For example, in the one instance by a brilliant, independent, versatile, flexible thinker, and in another by a persistent, well-disciplined, well-organized and obedient student with a good memory.

With the generally stated goals of higher education in mind, we might argue that what we want is to foster independence, versatility, and brilliance, rewarding their attainment and conceive of them as criteria. The argument for such criteria as these is not only that one might be more successful in developing empirical predictors of them than in predicting something as un-differentiated as grades in general but that, as pointed out above, such criteria might actually be of greater significance. Thus, a previous study reported in *The Journal of Social Issues,*[1] which was carried out on a group of alumnae 20-25 years out of college, showed that high grades obtained by women who were career-oriented in college had quite different determinants, as well as implications for the future, than did high grades obtained by women

[1] Vol. XII. No. 4, 1956. "Some Educational Patterns" by Donald R. Brown, p. 44.

who were oriented toward highly conformist roles. The same differential predictions could be made for women with low grades of these differing orientations. Indeed, a group of underachievers who were not career-oriented but who were low on authoritarian ideology and social peer group integration appeared to have gotten more out of the college experience and grown further in intellectual spheres than a group of high graded non-career oriented but conformist type women. These findings have been corroborated by a four-year study of eighty current students chosen at random from the class of 1958.

The college is interested in diverse areas of the student's development which are not indicated by academic performance as such. According to the stated aims of most colleges interest goes beyond imparting knowledge and developing skills to such qualities as curiosity, responsibility, tolerance, flexibility, independence, openness to new experience, and so on.

One last criticism of grades has to do with the well documented fact of differing rates of maturing amongst college students as measured by such scales as the Vassar Developmental Scale.[2] These rates of maturing are not highly correlated with grades nor are they related to the Scholastic Aptitude Scores of the CEEB tests. Yet, as we shall see, they are related to faculty perceptions of ideal students and in themselves substitute at the upper end a description of students which closely parallels the stated aims of college educators.

Having dismissed graded performances as an adequate criterion, where do we turn? We have explored various paths ranging from R. W. White's[3] notions regarding the stabilization of ego identity, the deepening of interests, the humanizing of values and the freeing of personal relationships as major growth trends as seen in our four-year interview study of the class of 1958, to securing empirical predictors of faculty nomination. Let us turn to the specific study at hand.

Design of the Study:

The Criterion:

The approach to setting the criterion for this study was frankly exploratory. It was felt that without claiming any absolute validity for faculty judgments of individual students that it might be argued that faculty judgments nonetheless have special relevance in an educational institution.

In order to provide as complete a specification of the criterion

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[2] *Research Manual for the V.C. Attitude Inventory*, 1957, Mellon Foundation, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, N. Y.

[3] *Lives in Progress*. New York: Dryden, 1952.

group as possible without prejudicing the judgment of the faculty or making the task too difficult to get cooperation, the following request was sent to all members of the faculty from the admissions office:

> "Since in our opinion, the best judges of successful college performance are the teaching faculty, we would like the teachers to nominate a group of superior students whose records will be studied. We would like to ask each of you to give us the names of any students in the class of '57 who, on the basis of advanced (Grade 3) work done with you, seem to belong to such a group. We are not attempting to define the criteria for selection, realizing there are different kinds of excellence among students whose development and achievement during their four years of college were such as to make their teachers think of each, "She is the kind of young woman we want at Vassar."
>
> Obviously, if we were interested in grades alone we could select our group from available records. While we would expect most of the students nominated to have done generally superior work in college, it is possible that some have been outstanding in one field and would be overlooked if we relied on the credit ratio as the basis for selection.
>
> Although we are not asking for any definition of general criteria for nominations, if possible we should like to know the basis for specific selections. Therefore, we would like you to indicate briefly, next to each student's name, why you think she should be included in this study.
>
> If none of the members of 1957 who took advanced work with you seem to have been of the caliber that we are trying to identify please return the nomination sheets with a statement to that effect."

This request resulted in the nomination of 67 members of the Class of 1957 from a total of 310 (21.6%). Each name was accompanied by a statement of varying detail explaining the basis of nomination by a faculty member.

The nominated group was then classified by whether the nominee had achieved a four-year cumulative credit ratio of above or below 3 (3 corresponding to an A-average). 57% were above 3, and 43% below, the lowest being 2.4.

In order to determine what differentiated the various types of college achievement as seen by the faculty versus college grades re-

ceived, all students in the class with credit ratios of 3 or above, but not nominated, were also included, as well as a random sample of non-nominees with credit ratios below 3. The former number 45 and the latter 41. There were no faculty statements on these people.

For cross validational purposes a similar procedure was later followed on the Class of 1958, and 21.3% of the class were nominated with approximately the same proportions of above and below 3 credit ratios.

In addition to giving the names of "ideal" students, the faculty were asked to give the qualities which the nominees possessed which led to their nomination. These statements varied from a few descriptive adjectives to detailed statements of one or two pages. In order to analyze these data a content analysis was performed using the following fifteen categories listed in order of frequency with which they were mentioned. The actual frequency is given as per cent after each category.

1. *Cognitive Intelligence:* brilliant, quick grasp of concepts, superior intellect, etc. 22.2%
2. *Directed Intellectual Curiosity:* wide range of interests, goes beyond assignments, alert, enthusiastic, directed orientation, etc. 17.7%.
3. *General Likability:* pleasant, modest, cooperative, helpful, etc. 9.7%.
4. *Growth During College:* shows high level of maturity as compared to freshman year, marked progress in work, etc. 7.8%.
5. *Independence:* self-directed, works by self, etc. 6.6%.
6. *Specific Skills:* writes well, talks well, good laboratory technique, etc. 5.4%.
7. *Integration:* well-organized, retains and utilizes material from diverse sources, sees relationship within field, integrates subject with other fields, etc. 4.9%.
8. *Penetration:* goes beneath surface, depth of understanding, etc. 4.8%.
9. *Analytic:* shows critical judgment, etc. 4.8%
10. *Moral Responsibility:* good citizenship, leadership, etc. 4.8%.
11. *Originality:* creative etc. 3.7%.
12. *Flexibility:* openmindedness, tolerance, respect for facts, profits from criticism, etc. 2.2%.
13. *Promise for Future:* make a good scholar in the field, etc. 2.0%.

14. *Aesthetic Appreciation:* sensitive to beauty, appreciates art, etc. 1.7%.
15. *Intellectual Integrity:* honest, forthright etc. 1.7%.

If one combines the total responses in categories 1 and 2 (Cognitive Intelligence and Directed Intellectual Curiosity), forty per cent of the total responses are accounted for by this almost pure intellectual factor. It is interesting, none the less, that such personality factors as "General Likability" and "Growth During College" are third and fourth in frequency followed by a general integrative-analytic factor which accounts for about fifteen per cent.

Thus, by their own statements, faculty see "ideal" students as having a high degree of intellectual power which is directed toward objects of intellectual interest in an independent manner and disciplined along integrative, penetrating and analytic lines. It is important, however, that the cognitive-intellectual aspects of the students' development not be one-sided so that qualities of friendliness, helpfulness, and cooperativeness not be lost nor the moral implications of one's intelligence be slighted.

A student, of course, need not possess all of these qualities to be seen as ideal. An unusual amount of originality, flexibility, or the possession of a highly developed skill relevant to college performance will often compensate for other lacks. Furthermore, the faculty is appreciative of marked growth along intellectual and personality lines during college and interprets such growth in an honorific way. When one reads the kinds of growth mentioned in the nomination statements, one is struck by the similarity to the kinds of normal developmental changes felt to be desirable in late adolescence and earlier adulthood by psychologists. Such trends are deepening and broadening of interests, the humanizing of values, the stabilizing of the ego functions, loosening of purely defensive mechanisms, etc., are frequently alluded to.

It appears then, that the faculty admires high level ability but prefers to find it housed in a well integrated, developing, pleasant, purposeful young person. Nor are they overly influenced by performance as indicated by grades alone. The distribution of grades referred to above indicates that, while a student must be in the top half of her class to be nominated, she need not be a "straight A" person. Indeed. in some instances students with Junior Phi Beta Kappa status were given negative nominations although these were not requested, indicating that the grades achieved were by techniques of manipulation,

over-conformity, and brute effort without any saving grace or real intellectual interest.

The Variables:

Having chosen the four criterion groups for the classes of 1957 and 1958, our attention now turns to the thirty-three quantified variables and the item analysis of the Vassar test battery of our subjects. These data were available before the subjects were chosen for the study as a result of the ongoing Mellon Research Program. All members of the two classes had taken the total Mellon Test Battery in both their freshman and senior years which constitutes eighteen of the variables as test scores. Six of the variables are the freshman and senior year scores on three factors which were found to account for most of the variance in the Vassar scales by Dr. Harold Webster.[4]

In addition to these twenty-four variables, nine measures were taken from the college records and included. These were:

1. Type of high school—private or public.
2. Number of schools attended.
3. Admission group—rating given in the Vassar Admission Committee when the applications are considered. Essentially, it amounts to a quartile rating with 1 as high.
4. SAT Verbal.
5. SAT Mathematical.
6. CEEB English Achievement.
7. Sum of the two CEEB Achievements offered.
8. Rank in secondary school equated for size.
9. Senior Credit Ratio.

RESULTS

Having selected the subjects and gotten descriptions of those nominated as seen by the faculty, we can now turn to our analysis of the test data and compare how each of the four criterion groups relate one to the other on these independent measures.[5]

As to be expected, the grade point ratio holds up as the most efficient predictor of faculty nominations. However, as indicated above, the nominees covered a wide range of grades and from the descriptions provided by the faculty it is obvious that other non-intellective factors

[4] For description of the variables and the factor analysis see footnote No. 4.

[5] A complete description of all of the technical operations, including the discriminant function analysis, item analysis of the test battery, and T-test analyses is included in Brown, D. R. *Non-Intellective Factors and Faculty Nominations of Ideal Students: A Report to the College Entrance Board,* Mellon Foundation, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, N. Y.

played an important role in being seen as ideal and no doubt in achieving high grades. For example, during both the Senior and Freshman years, the general sequence of mean scores was almost invariably such that the nominated but below 3 credit ratio students had the most honorific scores. That is, they were seen as the most mature, confident, open to new experience, tolerant, able to express and tolerate impulse, showing great growth during college, being high on masculine interest, and low on the Berkeley F-scale and ethnocentrism.

The nominated above 3 credit ratio groups had the next highest scores on these variables. While the non-nominated high graded people and the non-nominated low graded people follow in that order.

It is interesting to look at the comparison of nominated and non-nominated above 3 students which shows that a student who is nominated versus one who is not is apt to come from a public school, have a higher Senior Credit Ratio, be low on maturity and confident suppression, high on dominance and self-confidence as a freshman, and show a decreasing degree of repression-suppression.

In contrast to these above three people the below 3 students who were nominated show a somewhat different picture. In addition to higher grades than the non-nonimated, we find again a high dominance and self confidence but also a high impulse expression score which implies that faculty favor a certain amount of unrestraint and expressivity of impulse in students who are not able to achieve top grades in the system. Also, the nominated people are higher on impulse expression, lower on F and E, higher in social maturity, and have a factor pattern which would indicate a personality more tactful about describing self and others, more perceptive, aware of strong impulses, more introceptive, less authoritatian, more realistic, and more mature than their non-nominated peers and for that matter than their nominated above 3 peers.

Comparing nominated groups with non-nominated groups, above and below 3 people combined, we find that the faculty nominates people who have a good credit ratio, who are high on admission criteria but not necessarily top candidates, who have high social maturity, who show a moderate amount of impulse-expression, who are low on measures of repression and suppression, who achieve high developmental status as seniors, who are low on conformity and integration into the student peer culture, who have adequate self confidence, who are mildly dominating, who tend toward masculine interests, and are low on authoritarian tendencies both personally and on socio-political issues.

The descriptions arrived at by the use of personality scales taken

independently of the selection of the nominees throws considerable light on the kinds of personality and social functioning which appeals to the faculty and could therefore be taken as a further specification of the implicit goals of a liberal arts education.

It is of interest to mention one further source of data gotten from self descriptions of the subjects. From a cross validated item analysis of our total 677 item battery, it is clear that the nominated students differed from the non-nominated in the Freshman as well as in the Senior year. For example, in the Freshman year before college had started, the nominated subjects gave descriptions showing less conventional social role perceptions, more introception, more masculinity, more civic-minded interests, and a less hysterically repressive type of defensive structure. In the Senior year the items remaining after cross validation gave much reinforcement to the denial of conventional social relations and conventional women's role prescriptions by these nominees. Also, there is a hypochondriacal trend running through the items which is probably more a reflection of frank admission of difficulties and lack of conventional suppression than actual exaggeration of symptoms or somaticizing. Other trends include a definite tolerance of ambiguity and acceptance of the theoretical and abstract as worthwhile. The civic-minded and somewhat liberal civil liberties type orientation with an appreciation of the dignity of the individual reflects itself as well although the personal orientation is often on the introverted, introspecting and introceptive sides. Combined with these social attitudes there is evident less dependence on supernatural-mystical events and false optimism but this is not accompanied by cynicism or paranoid tendencies. Rather, there appears a sense of inner direction and tempered confidence and a strong sense of morality. In the realm of family there is a wish for greater freedom and a frank criticalness of parents without strong guilt feelings and accompanied by social responsibility. There also is evident a sense of adventure but in a morally responsible manner rather than an impulsive acting out.

The overall impression gotten from these self-descriptions, then, is quite frankly a favorable one for nominees as against non-nominees. Whether these personal qualities are conductive to high performance or are a result of the confidence that comes from being admired by the faculty cannot be answered from these data but it is not hard to see what the faculty found to their liking.

The senior results give a start in the construction of a scale for predicting faculty nominations as well as some insights into the qualities that result in such nomination. It is planned to pursue these data further.

Again one is struck by the similarity of these findings in regard

to the ability to seriously profit from the wares of the college on the part of some students and our alumnae study findings referred to earlier. It appears that basic personality orientations present before college are extremely important. One wonders what part the role of self selection by the applicants to various colleges has played in the productivity of those colleges.

CONCLUSIONS

The study seems to indicate that the students seen by faculty as ideal products of a liberal arts program have several consistent traits. These traits agree well with what we have accepted on faith as the value of liberal arts programs and indicate that, in spite of the difficulty in verbalizing these goals, faculty are quite capable of recognizing these qualities in students and even in specifying what they are in reference to particular students. One is also struck with how closely the pattern of traits seen as ideal by the faculty approximate the types of descriptions given by personality theorists to concepts such as maturity. It is tempting to suggest that in addition to indicating a certain mastery of a content area, the M.S. might also often be read as "Master of Self."

Research of this sort is bound to raise many important questions regarding educational policy. Foremost amongst them is the possible use of non-intellective or motivational measures as selection devices for college admissions. It seems to the present writer that a hasty step in that direction would be very unwise for the following reasons: First of all, the findings are too tentative to be practically useful as predictors. Secondly, to select people on non-intellective grounds rather than on measures thought to relate to potential intellectual capacity would not only be anti-intellectual but would be tantamount to refusing to face the challenge of maximizing the development of each student capable of being developed. Thirdly, such predictors would have to be worked out for each college in terms of the environmental presses operating in that college to be more efficient than present intellective and performance predictors. Rather it would seem desirable to continue research of the kind that would help us as educators to structure our curricula and teaching methods in ways best suited to develop our students along lines compatible with our goals and the goals of society in supporting higher education. This can best be done by a thorough knowledge of the developmental processes taking place in students intellectually and emotionally and the dynamics of such processes as they interact in the cultural milieu of the institution.

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